Look out for travel bugs as you wander out yonder

Travellers heading out into Western Australia's wild blue yonder this spring are being asked to join WA's biosecurity efforts by keeping an eye out for unwanted plant and animal pests, and to take precautions to prevent the spread of pests, weeds and disease within the state.

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) is reminding travellers that unwanted weed seeds, disease spores and pests can be expert hitchhikers, unknowingly hiding in or on clothes, camping gear and cars.

While border closures are restricting visitors from other states, the surge in Western Australians travelling within our state means an increased risk in spreading pests that are already present in parts of WA to areas of the state where they aren't. These pests could significantly impact our agriculture industries, the environment and our WA lifestyle.

DPIRD says while most travellers know about the need to surrender their fresh fruit and vegetables at the WA border, they might not know that fruit and vegetables cannot be taken into the Ord River Irrigation Area near Kununurra. This is to prevent the introduction of Mediterranean fruit fly (Medfly) to the area. Medfly is established in the south of WA, from Carnarvon through to Esperance.

Another example is restrictions on the movement of honey and bee products out of the Kimberley region, to protect our bees and prevent the spread of small hive beetle to the rest of the state.

DPIRD says hitchhiking pests of high biosecurity concern to WA in 2020 include the Russian wheat aphid, European wasps, cane toads, and any weeds with prickly 'burrs'.

Simple actions such as brushing off dirt from shoes and camping equipment, and bagging food scraps will go a long way to keeping the state safe from these biosecurity threats. These guidelines are not tough and can easily become part of normal travelling practices.

DPIRD points out these actions will also help thwart those opportunistic pests that are not established in WA, but which occasionally breach state borders on clothing and vehicles, and in fresh fruit and vegetables.

Priority hitchhiking pests not in WA, but which we still need to keep an eye out for, include red imported fire ant, Queensland fruit fly, and the plant disease myrtle rust (which is spread by spores). Also watch out for birds such as starlings and sparrows.

Early detection of these pests is key to eradication. To make reports and send photos of any suspect pests, weeds, birds or plant damage, download the MyPestGuide^{TM} app onto a mobile device, or go online to make a report – mypestguide.agric.wa.gov.au.

You can also send a report to our Pest and Disease Information Service via padis@dpird.wa.gov.au or call 9368 3080.

Tips for travellers

- Fresh fruit and vegetables can harbour pests such as Mediterranean and Queensland fruit fly. Play it safe by buying as you go, or dispose of produce in amnesty bins that are available throughout the State.

- Dispose of food waste securely in plastic bags before placing in rubbish bins. This will prevent spread of pests if food is infested.

- Brush down luggage and contents, shoes, clothing, tents, sleeping bags and other items before moving to your next location.

- Check your socks, shoes and clothing for burrs and seeds.

- Clean and dry all boating and fishing gear before fishing another waterway.

- Shake out car mats before moving on.

- Regularly remove bugs in car grills and check for seeds trapped in the tire grooves.

- Do not dispose of food waste in waterways – particularly crustacean heads and shells.

- Place dry food in airtight containers (including cereal, packaged grains, beans, lentils and seeds).

- Always check your pet's fur and paws for bugs, seeds and burrs before entering your vehicle.

- Keep your dogs on a leash at all times as poison 1080 baits are used throughout the state for the control of feral pests such as foxes, pigs and wild dogs.

- Respect farm biosecurity. Call owners before entering a property.